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BULLETIN

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TIWI BEACH AND LAGOON

During the week 22 to 28 April 1983 a group of 28 Hillcrest School Vth and VIth formers took part in a field course at Tiwi as part of the A level biology course. Despite the relatively short time, they carried out a lot of good work and I think that some of their observations might be of interest to members of the Society. Before mentioning these results however, I would like to say that although every effort was made to ensure accuracy in precise identification of organisms there may, in some cases, remain a certain doubt at the specific level at least. Any comments would be welcomed.

DISTRIBUTION AND NUMBERS OF A SELECTED LIST OF ORGANISMS

On 24 April at low tide (often in pouring rain!) 9 transects were made at 10 m intervals north of the borderline between Twiga Lodge campsite and Brown's mini-lets. Each group laid 0.25^2 quadrats at 5 m intervals starting at low tide water level on the reef and moving towards the reef. In these quadrats percentage plant cover was estimated. Along the same lines, in areas 0.5 m X 5 m every animal was counted - thus forming a band transect. Most groups managed to cover 130 m to 200 m in this way.

There is a distinct reef zone between 40 and 50 m wide consisting of bare, often eroded, dead coral. The dominant organisms were the sea urchins (mainly *Echinometra matthiae*) which reached a density of about 19 per m^2 (maximum count was 36 per m^2). This seemed to preclude any substantial algal growth, presumably the urchins scrape any young algae off the sides of their "burrows" as soon as they settle. The most common algae are *Ulva rigida*, *Turbinaria ornata* with varying amounts of *Laurencia papillosa* and *Dictyosphaeria cavernosa*, all being small stunted forms.

From about 35 m back the lagoon is almost totally sand-covered with a few rocky outcrops (mainly not fixed) and a selection of rock pools of varying depth and surface area.

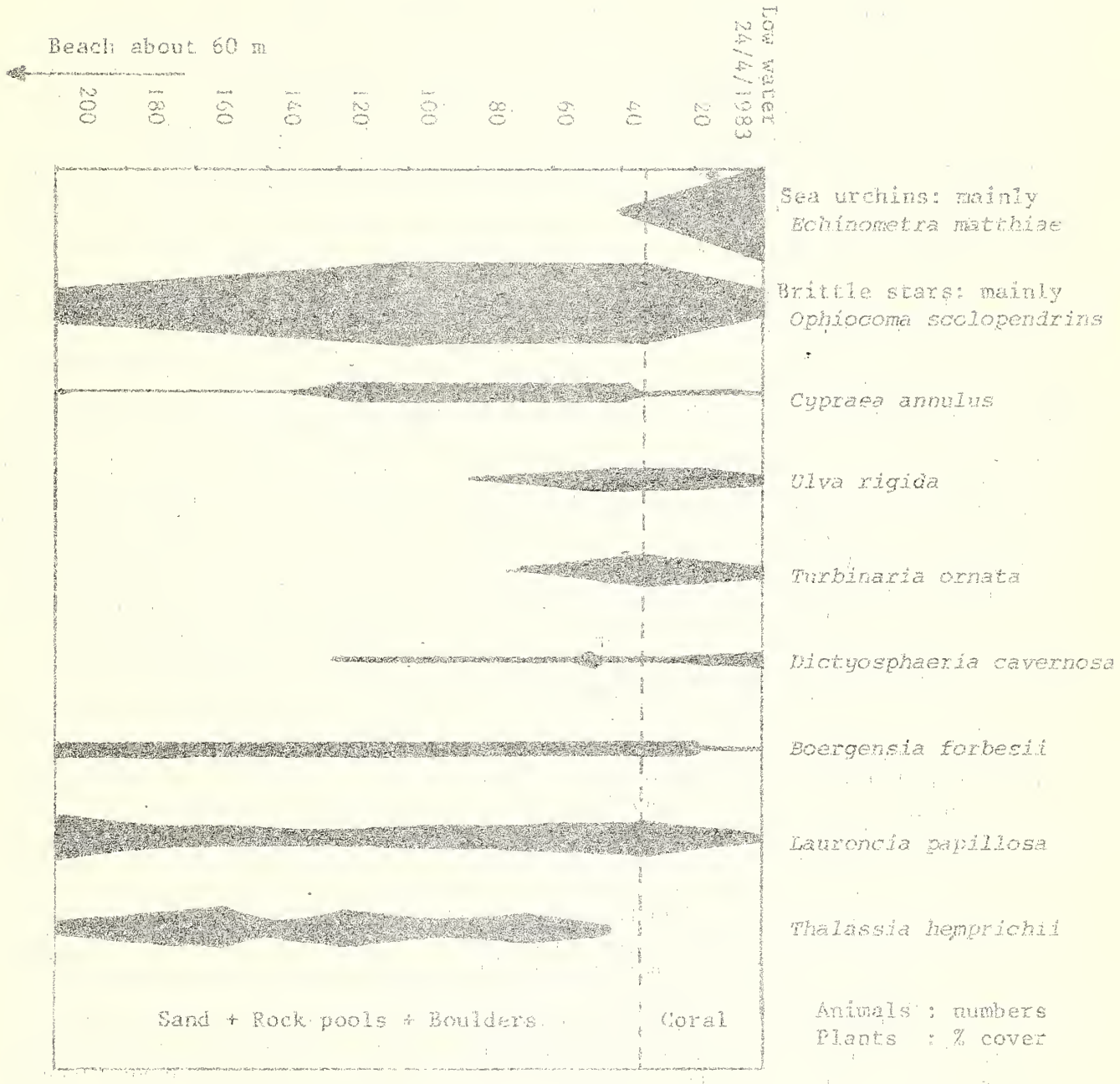
Ulva rigida crossed the transition zone, and in fact made an obvious band just behind the reef, but petered out some 80 m back, this coincided with the appearance and later dominance of the angiosperm *Thalassia hemprichii*, which covered about 50 per cent of this lagoon area. The other obvious and dominant plant being the purple/brown *Laurencia papillosa* (a red alga) - large, about 30 cm long and luxuriously branched individuals. Among the animals in this area, as sea urchins became rarer, the brittle stars and ring cowrie *Cypraea annulus* became more common. The former are remarkably abundant usually being between 20 and 40 per m^2 from 20 m away from the reef to close to the beach. This works out as there being in the order of 300 000 in the study area (about 60 000 sea urchins per 100 m reef). The ring cowries were always found on or under boulders and rocks, these being about 4 per m^2 in the most densely populated areas; but with very patchy distribution. Few other animals were present in any numbers, sea cucumbers (the black type) had a density of about 1 per 62 m^2, starfish (all types) 1 per 80 m^2.

Thus although there is a clear reef zone, and possibly one behind the reef ('transition') there is no zonation of the clear type seen in temperate countries. This is probably because:

a. The lagoon is relatively flat and fills up rapidly. (The sea comes over the reef at a tide height of about 1.6 m, the lagoon being completely filled about 30 minutes later during the neap tide and 10 minutes later during the spring tide at a height of about 1.8 m).

b. The tide enters firstly from the beach channel via the 'mlango' to the south and secondly over the reef. This produces rather a complex pattern of sequential submergence which would be interesting to analyse in greater detail.

c. Rock pools, which are permanently filled and of varying depths, are common and will obscure any zonation pattern.



RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OF SELECTED ORGANISMS IN TIWI LAGOON

TWO OTHER STUDIES MADE BY THE STUDENTS (Selected from many)

1. MANGROVES

Visits were made to the mangroves closest to the sea where the Mwachema river opens out at the south end of Tiwi beach. This area consists mainly of *Avicennia marina*, with many seedlings in evidence but with few properly rooted; however the number of *Rhizophora mucronata*, with their distinctive stilt roots, has increased quite markedly over the last two years, many of them being over 2 m tall. As yet they are well shaded by *Avicennia*. Thus, *Rhizophara* are probably on the ascendant; this is a succession well worth watching. Vast numbers of horn shells were seen *Terebralia palustris* among the pneumatophares of the mangroves in the muddy sand along with crabs (including fiddler crabs) and a variety of small snails on the leaves and branches of the trees. The river itself was very low (as seen from the main road). Large amounts of decaying seaweeds, mainly "sea grasses", were found in the estuary itself which seemed devoid of life although many children were fishing there with enthusiastic optimism.

2. *Convoluta* sp.

These are the small (about 2 mm) green flat worms seen as a green tinge on the wet sand at the edge of the steep slope of the beach. They contain algal cells (possibly *Platymonas convolutae* ?) with which they have a mutualistic symbiotic relationship. We had read that they, *Convoluta roscoffensis* on beaches in the Channel Islands, show a tidal rhythm under continuous illumination but some students found this did not occur, they remained on the surface throughout only moving downwards when disturbed or in the dark. A check was made at low tide on the beach at night, none were seen. In glass cylinders they were seen to move down to 30 cm (the depth of the cylinder) with ease when provided with side illumination. We were not able to discover at what depth they are found during high tide, probably they settle where there is no sand movement. *Convoluta* avoided high temperatures (about 35°C +), high and low salinities and movement e.g. gentle rocking of the tray in which they were kept. They tended to congregate at the edge of standing water and on the slope facing the sun. Some students noted that they appeared more common near decaying seaweeds (this was not tested) they suggested it could be an area where minerals such as nitrates will be more likely to be found. Thus, in conclusion, they seem to be adapted to behave in such a way as to give the maximum light to the algae and to avoid drying out and being washed away by the in-coming tide. The flatworms were observed under the microscope and our observations seem to confirm the lack of digestive (though they do have a mouth) and excretory systems. This is a particularly interesting association and one very amenable to study; from the literature we found that the young worms do not grow until they have ingested the flagellated single algae which are attracted towards the egg cases although the algae will grow *in vitro* in the absence of the worms.

On the whole it was a very successful trip but, as is usual with this kind of thing, it served to bring up more questions than answers.

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B.R. Maudsley, Hillcrest Secondary School, Box 24819, Nairobi.

BREAST MARKINGS IN THE DARK-BACKED WEAVER AT KAKAMEGA FOREST

The Dark-backed Weaver *Ploceus bicolor* is represented in Kenya by two races: *kersteni* and *mentalis*. *P.b. kersteni* is found in the coastal lowlands of Kenya and Tanzania, while *P.b. mentalis* occurs in Uganda, reaching Kenya in the Kakamega and Nandi Forests (Britton 1980). The coastal race is all black above with a black throat and golden yellow underneath, whereas *mentalis* has a grey rump and mantle in contrast to the black head, and the yellow below is paler, extending into the centre of the throat (Mackworth-Praed & Grant 1960). The throat markings are, however, subject to considerable variation, even within a particular race (Chapin 1954).

During a trip to Kakamega Forest on 17 April 1983 I was interested to observe four Dark-backed Weavers, for two reasons. Firstly, they were edging sideways along the branches and 'rubbing shoulders' rather in the manner of Lovebirds *Agapornis* spp., an action which I have not previously observed in weavers. Secondly, all four birds had a prominent dark spot in the centre of the breast. I had to admit the possibility that as it had been raining earlier, the dark marking could have been a side effect of the wet atmosphere, but the birds themselves did not look bedraggled and the marking seemed too obvious and uniform in all four birds. The time of this observation was approximately 15.00 h.

It is perhaps interesting to note for comparison that I had previously seen a breeding pair of Dark-backed Weavers in the morning of the same day, also in damp, post rain conditions, but had not observed any trace of breast marking on either of this pair.

Search through East African reference books produced no indication of any race or immature phase of *P. bicolor* with any markings on the breast. However, in West Africa, the Grey-backed Weaver *P.b. tephronotus* is noted as having a small partly hidden black spot in the middle of the upper breast (Bates 1930). Similarly, in South Africa, the nominate race of the Forest Weaver *Symplectes bicolor bicolor* is stated to have a dark spot in the centre of the chest (McLachlan & Liversedge 1978). The range of neither of these two races extends into East Africa, so these references, though encouraging, did little to clarify the status of the birds seen in Kakamega Forest.

I then made enquiries to find out if there were any personal, unpublished, records which might support my sighting, but nobody knew of any records of this bird featuring anything other than a pure yellow underside. Doubts were even cast on the accuracy of the South African reference to a dark spot on the breast, which, admittedly, is not featured in the (sideview) illustration of the nominate race in that book.

I finally found the answer in the collection of bird specimens in the National Museum in Nairobi. I found two specimens of *mentalis* there, both recorded as having been collected in Kakamega Forest, and both with black marks in the centre of the breast. I set out below label details of these two specimens, plus my own notes on the breast markings which I measured:

1. Reg. No.14749 - *Simplectes bicolor mentalis*, female, post breeding. 10 February 1957 Collector J.G. Williams. Kakamega Forest. The black mark on the breast measured 8 mm x 5 mm.

2. Reg. No.14744 - *Ploceus bicolor*, female, enlarged ovaries, weight 27.3 g collector A.D. Forbes-Watson. Kakamega Forest Station. 8 December 1966. The black mark on the breast measured 5 mm x 4 mm.

When seen from the front, level with the bird, the breast marking could be difficult to observe in the field, being overlapped in some places by yellow-tipped feathers above and beside it. However, the centre of the mark itself

is formed by a number of all black feathers (not by parting yellow-tipped feathers to reveal the black below, as has been suggested) and would be quite a prominent feature when seen from below the bird, which was the view I had in the forest.

Various other specimens of the races *P.l. mentalis* and *kersteni*, for comparison, were examined at the museum. Traces of a dark breast marking was also found on one specimen from the North Nandi Forest, collected in 1978, and on two old specimens collected in 1915 from Yala River Forest. I do not think that these particular markings would be too evident in the field, and the marking on the specimen from the North Nandi Forest appeared rather as a black and yellow mottling than as a distinct black mark.

I am now of the opinion that the Dark-backed Weaver in Kakamega Forest can occur with a black spot on the breast and I hope to return there to investigate further. No doubt there are those who will view my opinion with some scepticism. My only comment can be an invitation to view the collection of skins at the Museum and to examine the two specimens I have mentioned.

My question now must be; bearing in mind the dates of collection of these two specimens, has there been any published record of this breast marking in East Africa and if so where?

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Peter Fletcher, Box 43675, Nairobi.

It was decided to publish this interesting observation *pace* some members of the Ornithological Sub-Committee EANHS and another referee so that other observers can 'hot foot it' to Kakamega Forest to confirm it for themselves. The Museum skins would appear to provide incontrovertible evidence in support of the author's opinion.

Ed.

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REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

THE BREEDING OF THE ETHIOPIAN SWALLOW IN INTERIOR KENYA

Due to enquiries associated with the Kenya bird atlas scheme, what would appear to be the first breeding records of the Ethiopian Swallow in interior Kenya have come to light; Lavinia Grant and Adrian Lewis are compiling this material for publication.

To date, the breeding records are from an area between Rongai, the Loldaiga Hills and Suguta Mugie, but there may well be other sites on the northern edge of the highlands, particularly on outlying farms where the phenomenon is not considered unusual or worthy of report.

If anyone knows of breeding colonies, however small or unsuccessful, of this species in interior Kenya, even from the area specified above, would they please communicate the fact to Mrs L. Grant, El Karama Ranch, Box 172, Nanyuki. All correspondence will be answered and all contributors will be fully acknowledged. Thank you very much.

A.D. Lewis, Geology, Box 30197, Nairobi.

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TEN GREAT PLACES TO SEE BIRDS IN KENYA : PART 1

Having summarised the books useful for bird identification in Kenya (Lewis 1981, to which should be added the recently published *Birds of Africa* by Brown, Urban & Newman) and described the journals and schemes to which birdwatchers can send their data and observations (Lewis 1982a), I have received many queries, particularly from newcomers, concerning the best places in this prolific bird country to watch birds. There have already been three attempts to cover this subject.

Williams (1967) (new revised edition now widely available) is a good introduction to birdwatching sites in Kenya, but far too much attention is devoted to the standard National Parks (where car-borne birdwatching, as I will mention later, is such a frustration) at the expense of the more intriguing and productive areas like Kongelai, Kakamega and Sokoke; there is also the point that the long species lists given for each area tend to be detrimental in that (a) they often omit species that are common whilst including rarities, and (b) because they can give the erroneous impression, especially to the newcomer/novice, of being definitive i.e. engendering the feeling that if it is not on the list then you cannot have seen it, and vice versa.

The same author later produced *Birds and where to find them* as a chapter in Bolton (1970). This concentrates far less on the National Parks and lists some first rate birdwatching areas (but unfortunately mostly fails to give details of how to get to them) being divided into sections that deal with localities within easy day's drives of Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru, Kisumu, Kitale, Malindi, Nanyuki and Voi; there is also a section on where to find species of particular interest, and a welcome absence of the massive species lists of the author's earlier book.

The need for a guide to this country's best birdwatching areas should have been filled by Ray Moore's *Where to watch birds in Kenya* but, although this was in completed manuscript form over two years ago, it has regrettably still to be published. This book would have contained the same type of extensive species lists already criticised in the Williams guide, but its great value would lie in the detailed maps and directions to the best birdwatching areas of the country, together with hints on how to see the most when you are there.

So, in the wake of all this, the present article attempts in a limited way to act as a stop-gap for a real guide to birdwatching areas in Kenya and the many references will give the reader access to more detail: if nothing else it will save me from having to reiterate its contents to everyone who drops an enquiry into my Post Box! The areas described here include some of the best for birds in Kenya but they do not include them all; for example, Lake Naivasha is included while Lake Nakuru is not and the reasons for this are as follows.

Firstly, anywhere in the world, the way to see the greatest number of bird species is to visit the greatest diversity of habitats standard advice given to contributors to the Kenya Bird Atlas scheme (Lewis & Pomeroy in prep.), in order to raise as large as possible a list for each atlas square, stresses the need to visit as many types of habitat as possible within that square. Thus this this article talks not of the 'top ten' bird places in the country, but tries to provide a cross-section through Kenya's many habitats, from sea level to the top of Mt. Kenya, so that the reader can encounter as broad a spectrum as possible of Kenya's 1060 or so species - i.e. *a lot of species*.

Secondly, and of equal importance, the sites listed here are all places where the birdwatcher can *walk freely*. Viewing from a vehicle may be convenient and indeed necessary when watching big game, but personally I experience a great many frustrations trying to birdwatch from a car. My basic needs are to be out, on foot, alone or in a very small group, moving slowly and quietly, and using both eyes and ears to an equal extent. For this reason, this list contains only one major National Park (Mt. Kenya) as a whole, and this is an exception to the general rule in having extensive areas where walking is permitted. National

Parks are in any case relatively well known and publicised (e.g. Williams 1967) so that further description here would be superfluous.

As I said, this is *not* a 'top ten' of bird sites and the places are listed in no particular order of merit - and I have *absolutely no* vested interest in any of the commercial enterprises named. All bird names are given in their English form only, for brevity, and this nomenclature precisely follows Britton (1980), a relatively cheap book which is essential to any birdwatcher in East Africa. The occurrence of species will, in many cases, be seasonal; but this article only says 'where', not 'when', Britton (1980) will provide much of the seasonal data which I have omitted. As a good general guide to roads and place names, I recommend the *Kenya and northern Tanzania Route Map* (published by the Survey of Kenya, cost Sh.20/- or so, widely available). Oh, and another thing, the successful birdwatcher in Kenya, as anywhere, is the one who is up, out and about *early*.

The following books/articles are recommended as aids in the identification of difficult groups/species: Storm Petrels (Taylor 1982); Madagascar Squacco Heron (Turner 1980); White-eyed Pochard (Meadows & Pearson 1981); Palaearctic birds of prey (Porter, Willis, Nielsen & Christensen 1981); Lesser Spotted and Steppe Eagles (Pearson & Meadows 1979); Common, African and Great Snipe (Taylor 1980); Palaearctic Gulls (Grant 1982); Slender-billed and Black-headed Gulls (Pearson 1977); Terns (Britton 1977); Honeyguides (Forbes-Watson 1977); Greenbuls (Turner & Zimmerman 1979); Cisticolas (Lewis 1981-1982, 1982b); *Hippolais* warblers (Pearson in prep.); Red-backed and Red-tailed Shrikes (Pearson 1979); Forest Bird Calls (Keith & Gunn 1971. Copies available from EANHS Office).

THE LOCALITIES

1. Sokoke Forest - Mida Creek

Having stressed ten localities, I am immediately going to cheat (or then again cram more in and give a bonus) by including two superb bird areas at the coast in one. The Sokoke Forest and Mida Creek are so near each other, within walking distance in fact, that to visit one and miss the other is a complete waste.

There are three ways of seeing Mida Creek - (a) follow the coast road south past Gedi and Watamu until it ends, and then walk on a short distance through coastal scrub to emerge on the shore with a good view across the creek's entrance (Gilpin 1980), telescope useful; (b) take a small boat up the creek at high tide; (c) approach the inland side of the creek from the main Kilifi - Malindi road at the edge of Sokoke Forest (Gilpin 1980); this original turn off the main tarmac road was, a couple of years ago, becoming horrifically steep but could be circumventd by taking the next turn right on the way back towards Malindi and working back south to the actual track; soft sand can bog cars, and tracks generally become more awkward in wet weather; it is best not to leave cars etc. unattended, but it is driveable to the beach so, no problem; sit in shade of shielding mangroves and watch, in time honoured fashion, waders concentrated and pushed up the beach towards you by the rising tide (telescopes useful); birds are very distant at low tide but it is possible, and very pleasant to walk far out over the sand to obtain better views. Excellent for coastal waders and terns generally; specialities include Black and Reef Herons, Crab Plover, Red-shank and Bar-tailed Godwit; also notable for Carmine Bee-eater roost (Donnelly & Donnelly 1977).

Also, while talking about the actual coast, the following defy deletion:

(a) the fish market on the beach at Malindi; very good for gulls and terns including Great Black-headed Gull (Britton & Duffus 1974; Britton & Britton 1976) and Herring Gull (Britton 1974; Britton & Britton 1976).

(b) the estuary of the Sabaki: follow the B8 Garsen road north out of Malindi to where a small suspension bridge crosses the Sabaki river; leave car with askari on far side of bridge and take a longish walk down the northern side of the river to the estuary and sea; again birds distant if tide is out, telescope useful; specialities Broad-billed Sandpiper (Britton 1974); N.B. this is

its best Kenya locality but easily overlooked; usually in wide muddy estuary about half way from bridge at low tide line. Great Black-headed Gull (*op. cit.*), African Skimmer, Madagascar Pratincole and large flocks of waders, terns and gulls.

(c) Malindi Pipit; endemic coastal Kenya and southern Somalia, on coastal grasslands from Ngomeni (just north of the Sabaki) northwards, not rare.

(d) finally, pelagic seabirds constitute the least known sector of Kenya's avifauna so sea trips, particularly off Malindi or Shimoni, are quite likely to yield new species for the Kenya list; many of these birds are only certainly identifiable by experts, but it is still worth trying your luck (but, warning, the sea *can* be extraordinarily empty of bird life); examples of recent finds are Wilson's Storm Petrel (only confirmed by Britton (1981) although they are undoubtedly common off our shores); other petrels (Taylor 1982) and various boobies, albatrosses, prions etc. in the Pemba Channel (P. & M. Hemphill pers. comm.).

And if all this is not enough, just inland is the Sokoke Forest, which contains a whole range of interesting birds including several species of very limited range: Sokoke Scops Owl, Sokoke Pipit, Clarke's Weaver and Amani Sunbird (Britton & Zimmerman 1979). Other species which are not found, or occur only rarely, in Kaptumo Forests include Southern Banded Snake Eagle, Lizard Buzzard, Kenya Crested Guineafowl, Fischer's Turaco, Lesser Cuckoo, Forbes-Watson's Swift, Böhm's and Little-throated Spinetails, Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Green Barbet, Green Tinkerbird, Golden-tailed and Little-spotted Woodpeckers, lowland greenbuls including Hector (Keith & Gunn 1971; Turner & Zimmerman 1979), Red-capped Robin Chat, Spotted Ground Thrush, Forest and East Coast Batis, Retz's and Chestnut-fronted Helmet Shrikes and Black-breasted Glossy Starling.

Taking the distances from a map produced by the National Museum's Section of Ornithology, the various ways into Sokoke are: (a) the track along the forest edge, on the left of the road 22 km north of Kilifi ferry; (b) 3.1 km further north up the main road from this track there is another track into the forest, again on the left of the road, signposted Kararacha Forest Station; (c) coming south on the main road from Malindi, go 6.6 km past the turn to Gedi and Watamu and look for a track on the right signposted 'Arabuko Nature Reserve' (and, as I remember it, 'Jilore Forest Station') this track later bifurcates and 2.2 km up either fork brings you to open forest with relatively easy birdwatching.

Driving in Sokoke, you will notice very abrupt changes in the soil (sand) colour on the tracks; in combination with rainfall variations, these various soils produce a series of forest types (Britton & Zimmerman 1979) and while the more open type referred to offers the easier birdwatching, the denser impenetrable type also ungrudgingly offers its own birds, mist netting is very useful here.

The final point about Sokoke is that visits should be made *at dawn*, since bird activity at this altitude diminishes very quickly into the heat of the day; dawn to 9 a.m., and late afternoon are best. These coastal forests in general can be utterly quiet, with not even bird calls to guide the visitor, but perserverance is all; in particular, search for the noise, bustle and numerous species of a 'bird party' (Pomeroy & Tengecha 1982).

2. Lake Baringo

There can be few birdwatchers in Kenya who do not know of Terry Stevenson at Lake Baringo, and before I go any further I readily admit to being a good friend of his. However, straight from the shoulder, (and if you don't believe me you can go and judge for yourself), I do feel that the approach of both Terry and of the Lake Baringo Club as a whole blows a breath of fresh air through the stereotyped, insulated, 'minibus and National Park' type of tourism so common in Kenya.

The basic reason behind this approach is economic, since the Baringo area

lacks the large mammals widely but erroneously considered to be tourist's only interest, other phenomena have been promoted to replace them. Thus, at Baringo, rather than being encased in a vehicle roaring frantically around a game park and spending barely minutes with one animal before being hurried off to another, one is out in the bush on foot with Terry, or out on the superb lake in one of the Club's boats, witnessing the whole interest of the area - local peoples, geology, birds, insects, plants, mammals, reptiles - at first hand. During a recent visit, I helped Terry escort a group of visiting UK travel agents through the dry bush near the Club, and their unanimous verdict, which hits the nail dead centre, was that since coming to Kenya they had been shepherded through a succession of modern, asceptic vehicles and hotels but now, for the first time, they felt themselves actually *in Africa* and free to take a leisured but real interest in the phenomena around them. That says it.

The good points of a visit to Baringo are as follows:

(a) birdwalks in the area, led by Terry, from the Club every day in the early morning (the best time to birdwatch since Baringo is in the lower, hotter country) and late afternoon, cost nominal. Book them via Block Hotels, Nairobi, or at the Club's reception. The trip to the fault scarps to the west of the Club is excellent for some of Kenya's more northern birds: Jackson's and Hemprich's Hornbills, Bristle-crowned Starlings and Brown-tailed Rock Chats; other specialities of the area include Shikra, Verreaux's Eagle, Dark chanting Goshawk, Abyssinian Roller, Abyssinian Ground Hornbill, Grey Tit, Cliff Chat, Silverbird, Northern Masked and Little Weavers, Northern Red Bishop and White-billed Buffalo Weaver. To date well over 400 species have been recorded in the Baringo area.

(b) motorboats can be hired at the Club to view the prolific lake birds (Herons, Darter, Allen's Gallinule, Ducks etc.) and this provides good chances for photography.

(c) whereas every other Lodge/Hotel that I know of requires your return after early morning forays by 8.30 or 9 a.m. in order to have breakfast. Lake Baringo Club has the ideal concept of the *Birdwatcher's Breakfast*, a word with the Manager in the evening to the effect that you intend to be out and doing early the next morning secures you (a) tea or coffee at dawn to wake you up, and (b) a full breakfast *at whatever time in the morning you choose to return*; thus as much time as you like to birdwatch or whatever and no enforced rush back to eat - and this applies whether you birdwatch with Terry or on your own. Excellent - but why on earth don't more lodges do it?

(d) a very good 20 minute sound-tracked slide-show on Baringo and its birds is shown to Club residents each evening free of charge.

(e) Terry's cheap and highly informative book *The Birds of Lake Baringo* (1980) is now out of print, but a new, revised edition is on the way; highly recommended.

(f) the Club is soon to start daily camel safaris into the surrounding country and these slow treks will again be excellent for seeing birds. Visits to the manyattas of local people are also arranged and are of great interest.

(g) if you cannot afford to stay at the Club, there is an excellent camp-site next door, and campers are most welcome on the birdwalks etc.

(h) Baringo is now easily accessible from Nairobi on new tarmac roads. It is also an excellent centre for the region generally, and Terry will be pleased to give details of the following good bird areas: nearby Lake Bogoria (Flamingos, Silverbird, geysers, hot springs and Greater Kudu); Lake Nakuru, distant but all on superb new tarmac; Kapedo, on the edge of Kenya's arid north, with specialities like Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse, Shining Sunbird and Somali Sparrow; the forests on the top of the Tugen Hills (soon there will be an all-tarmac road, superbly scenic, to Kabarnet; a good selection of highland forest birds and many western specialities on the eastern edge of their range).

3. Migrant ringing at Ngulia Lodge, Tsavo West

While not talking about National Parks in general, here is a very specialised and fascinating locality. Migrant Palaearctic passerines , moving southwards through Kenya in the northern autumn, pass around the eastern edges of the Mt. Kenya/central Kenya/ Kilimanjaro area on a relatively narrow front that takes them over Ukambani and Tsavo. During this November/December period, the Tsavo/ Chyulu Hills area experiences rain and high ground is often cloaked in cloud or mist. So far so good; under normal circumstances, these night migrants would either pass on southwards above the mists, navigating by the stars and/or the moon, or they might be forced down sporadically by heavy storms.

In 1969, however, Ngulia Safari Lodge was opened on a north-facing bluff high on the Ngulia inselberg and provided with powerful north facing flood-lights for nocturnal game viewing. These lights attract the birds which can appear around and inside the lodge in their thousands, tens of thousands or more (Pearson & Backhurst 1976 and subsequent accounts in *Scopus*).

It used to be thought that the birds are actually lost and disorientated in the cloud, but it seems unlikely that every thin mist patch that drifts across the lights will contain its own mystified individuals; instead, it seems that in the absence of a competing moon, the birds are simply attracted down to the glow of the lights on the mist (D.J. Pearson pers. comm.). That there is nothing special about Ngulia beyond the combination of mists at the right season, altitude, position under the migrant route and north-facing lights has been confirmed by the attraction of night migrants to car headlights in the nearby Chyulu Hills (Nickolaus 1980), and by similar phenomena in the Sudan (Nickolaus & Pearson 1983) and southern Tanzania (N.E. Baker pers comm.).

A visit to Ngulia is a must. There are nights of course, sometimes several consecutive nights, when no mist condenses on the Ngulia ridge and the birds pour on overhead, leaving you sitting up all night for nothing, but this gamble is all part of the excitement of birdwatching and to be at the lodge on a good night *is* exciting. Nightjars crowd the rafters over the dining tables and whirring masses of feathers streak past the after dinner cigars to flutter, walk and sit around the bar, reception area, hotel corridors and balconies. And in the morning the low bushes between the lodge and its staff quarters can be creeping and writhing with the remnants of the night's descent. The greatest number of birds estimated to have been drawn to the lodge lights in one night was over 100 000 (Backhurst & Pearson 1977).

And it is not just the thrill of migration that appeals; there is also the quality of many of the birds seen and caught, ranging from Corncrakes, Eurasian Nightjar and Eurasian Roller to small thrushes (Rufous Bush Cat, Irania, Sprosser, Nightingale), warblers (Basra Reed, Marsh, Upcher's, Olivaceous, River, Willow, Blackcap, Garden, Whitethroat and Barred), Spotted Flycatcher and Red-backed and Red-tailed Shrikes, together with Afrotropical species like Harlequin Quail, Button Quail and a whole series of nightjars. During the day, *given luck*, migrant birds of prey in the area can include Lesser Spotted, Steppe and Booted Eagles, Hobby, Eastern Red-footed, Eleonora's and Sooty Falcon.

All this happens from about mid-November to mid or late December, at times of little or no moon; falls in the spring are rare since the migrants apparently overshoot the north-facing lights without being attracted and misty conditions are unusual then (Britton & Britton 1977; Pearson 1980). Ngulia is sign-posted from the Park entrance at Mtito Andei. Accommodation is available at the wonderfully situated (in a scenic sense) Lodge itself, or in the far cheaper but still scenically beautiful Ngulia Safari Camp bandas.

Don't miss it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to Hugh Sleep for the provision of the Bolton (1970) reference and to Graeme Backhurst for commenting on a draft of the script.

Thanks also to the very many birdwatchers, far too numerous to mention, who have over the years contributed information.

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Adrian D. Lewis, Geology, Box 30197, Nairobi.

FIELD NOTES FROM AUEA BIOLOGY DEPARTMENT

On 6 December 1982 a pair of Variable Sunbirds *Nectarinia venusta* were very busy feeding a very much larger juvenile Klaas' Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx klaas*, in the nature preserve on the AUEA campus near Kapsabet in western Kenya.

On 12 April 1983 a school boy brought a wounded Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana* that had been stoned at the edge of a marsh near Tilolwa (3 km due north of Kapsabet).

A Striped Crake *Porzana marginalis* was sighted in the Kimondi Swamp (10 km due north of Kapsabet) on 1 May 1983.

On 21 September 1982 a group of Black-headed Weavers *Ploceus cucullatus* moved into a grove of small eucalyptus trees on the AUEA campus and started noisy nest building. By Christmas they were all gone apparently without raising any young. They have not been seen here before or since by any of the birders on campus.

A Stump-tailed Chameleon *Brookesia spectrum* was found by students on a dirt road in Tiraki (36 km east of Kapsabet) on 16 April 1983. This small chameleon that looks like a brown leaf is very slow when it moves at all, but is alive and eating meal worms in the AUEA Biology Lab.

Larry Siemens, Biology, Adventist University of Eastern Africa, Box 2500, Eldoret.

SILK SHEETS ON ROCK FACES

On 29-30 January 1983 the Geological Club of Nairobi held a weekend camp near Enkorika, 20 km south east of Kajiado. Participants enjoyed some pleasant walks on the hills around, including Ol Pusi Moru to the south and Ngoragaishi to the east.

In several places we saw shiny, silvery sheets covering areas of many square metres on exposed rock faces. On close inspection these were found to consist of a dense web of fine silk threads, laid to form a sheet at the surface and a looser mesh within. The silk was resilient despite the extreme thinness of the threads, but it was not sticky.

Within the silk mesh we could see clusters of tiny, rotund, light brown insects with short legs. Most were juvenile but there were also a few adults with membranous wings. They proved to belong to the order Psocoptera, a group that includes the booklice. Outdoor species feed on fungi, unicellular algae and lichens, such as would grow on an exposed rock face. The large communal webs protect the insects from marauding predators while they browse.

It is very striking that such enormous communal webs are built by such tiny insects. The population of any one of the large silk sheets we saw must run into millions. It was also remarkable to see, in a small cluster of insects kidnapped from one of the sheets, how rapidly they filled up the inside of their container with a new silk mesh

Jo Darlington, c/o Section of Entomology, National Museums of Kenya.

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CHAT ABOUT PEMBROKE HOUSE

A pair of White-browed Robin Chats *Cossypha heuglini* made a nest on 8 May 1983 in Pembroke House School Chapel, of leaves and twigs. They built it on the hymn number rack.

On 15 May, the first egg was laid, followed on 16 May by a second one. The female then began to sit on them.

On Tuesday, 31 May, both eggs hatched, one in the morning and the other at midday. The young were about 4 cm long. The male and the female immediately began to feed the chicks large quantities of food.

On Monday, 6 June, we studied the birds for an hour. The female fed the chicks most and the male occasionally brought in food. We moved forward about two rows of seats every ten minutes or so. We noticed that earthworms, beetles and flies were regularly brought in. During the hour we spent in the Chapel, the parents came eighteen times to feed the young. We did not hear many sounds made by the chicks, except occasional high chirping noises.

On Wednesday, 8 June, Mr Peter Davey came to photograph the parent Robin Chats feeding the young.

The chicks learnt to fly on 14 June and we often found them sitting solemnly under the Chapel Chairs. We then picked them up and put them back in the nest. We saw that they had lots of mites on their bodies and especially on their heads.

On 15 June, we studied the birds again for half an hour. This time we noticed that the parents came in three times and brought much bigger insects to the chicks.

The young Robin Chats flew out of the Chapel in the morning of 16 June.

TABLE 1

WHITE-BROWED ROBIN CHAT SURVEY

IN PEMBROKE HOUSE CHAPEL ON MONDAY 6 JUNE

Minutes between visits	Time	M or F	Type of Food	Comments
*	4.20	F	Worm	
* 13	4.33	F	or Fly	
* 2	4.35	F	Bee or Fly	Took babys' dropping out
* 4	4.39	F	Beetle	
* 5	4.44	F	Grub	
* 1	4.45	F	Worm	
* 2	4.47	F	Beetle or Fly	
+ 1	4.48	F	Fly or something else	
+ 1	4.49	M & F	M. Worm F. Fly	Started raining
+ 3	4.52	M & F	M. Fly F. Worm	M. Took dropping
° 7	4.59	F	-	
° 6	5.05	F	Earth Worm	Tried to sit on nest, took dropping
≠ 7	5.12	F	Worm	Took dropping
# 1	5.13	F	Worm	Took dropping
# 1	5.14	M	Beetle	
# 1	5.15	F	Worm	
# 5	5.20	M & F	Worms	F. Disturbed by us, flew
# 3	5.23	F	Worm	Sat on nest

* We sat on chest at back of Chapel
\+ We moved 3 rows forward
° We moved to the 5th row from back
≠ " " " " 6th " " "
" " " " 7th

Nest built 8.5.83
1st egg laid 15.5.83
2nd " " 16.5.83
1st " hatched 31.5.83
2nd " " 31.5.83
1st took 17 days to hatch
2nd " 16 " " "
1st chick went 16.6.83
2nd chick " 16.6.83

Female. Lighter back, bigger, not shy Male. Black back, smaller, shy. (NB. We are not sure about this).

R. McCartney and N. Röttcher, Pembroke House School, Box 31, Gilgil, Kenya.

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REMINDER

So far, the Secretary has had notification from only a very few local members who would like to continue on the mailing list for all issues of *Journal* papers. As mentioned in the notice which appeared in the July/August issue of the *Bulletin*, a tear off slip with the title of papers published from time to time will be supplied and those members who would like to receive that particular paper will, of course, do so.

However, anyone wishing to receive all issues is once again requested to notify the Secretary as soon as possible.

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BENDERA BIRDS

I covet my neighbour's garden as in it are three magnificent fig trees, proud remnants of the great forest that once covered this area. When the figs are ripe, apart from the usual residents like Mousebirds, Bulbuls etc., the fruit-eating birds flock in. The figs must have been just right on or about 18 June as about 20 Violet-backed Starlings had spent some considerable time in the trees on 19 June and the White-headed Barbets had been on a 'recce'. On 20 June, nine Silvery-cheeked Hornbills flew in and while I was watching them there was an upsurge of noise and activity in the front garden. As such disturbance usually merits investigation, I rushed to see what was happening. Sitting in a leafless Commiph ra *Commiphora zimmermannii* were two Hornbills and a Green Pigeon. I thought it rather odd as the pigeon was sitting so conspicuously just above eye-level and it looked agitated. I then noticed that one of the Hornbills had a Green Pigeon in its claws. I could see that it was not a fledgling; the green tail feathers were spread like a fan and the plump body firmly held.

Priscilla Allen told me that on 11 April, 1978 her cook had reported that he had seen a Hornbill take a dove and had shown her the eggs smashed on the ground. She thought that he might have been mistaken although he had been very positive about it, but thought it interesting enough to write up for the *Bulletin* (*EANHS Bulletin* 1978: 84-85).

Last year, I saw Hornbills tipping nests out of a tree, but I could not see if they ate anything from the nests.

On the occasion reported above, the Hornbills flew off, so I do not know whether this particular pigeon was eaten.

D. Brass, Bendera Lane, Box 59196, Nairobi.

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NOTES ON FISCAL SHRIKE & KLAAS' CUCKOO

One June morning in 1983, I was in my garden when I heard the continuous alarm call of a Fiscal Shrike. It has inhabitated this area for many months and usually ignores my presence. One of the dogs was looking intently at the tall cactus plant nearby. This plant is about 2 m in height and I suddenly noticed a very young bird impaled on the top of the cactus spikes. It had been decapitated and was neatly impaled through its nape. It was obviously a nestling and I think, a young Kikuyu White-eye. It's underparts were all pale yellow and I knew of a pair nesting in another part of the garden close by. The Shrike was still scolding hard when on another cactus spike I saw exactly the same thing, another White-eye impaled, but not quite so securely.

I knew that the Fiscal Shrike often impales its food on thorns etc., but had never witnessed this before. So I went to fetch my camera. On returning I noticed that the second young bird corpse had been lifted off the spike and replaced - this time more securely.

A few hours later I returned to find virtually only the legs of one nestling left and no sign of the second one. Ants were already climbing the cactus and attacking the remains.

On the same morning I saw a female Klaas Cuckoo sitting in one of the thorn trees. About 50 m away a fledgling was chirping continuously for food. On close examination I discovered that it was a young Klaas' Cuckoo, so I watched for a time and saw a female Bronze Sunbird busily and tirelessly feeding, what to her, must have been a very large and hungry offspring. The female Cuckoo did not feed what was presumably her young - but I have witnessed them feeding their own chicks on a previous occasion.

Mrs E.M. Nickalls, Langata, Nairobi.

RED-BILLED FIREFINCH INDIGOBIRD

A nest of the Red-billed Firefinch *Lagonosticta senegala* was built in creepers on an earth/rock wall in my garden at Langata and was discovered on 9 June, with four young newly hatched birds.

These fledged on 30 June, 1983 and it was noted that *one* of their number was quite different, larger, with decidedly non-breeding indigobird (female) plumage. All four chicks were fed together outside the nest by both male and female Red-billed Firefinch parents.

An adult male Red-billed Firefinch Indigobird *Hypochera chalybeata* in full breeding plumage with several females had been seen regularly during the month on the bird table, which was only 10 m away from the nest

Peter Davey, Box 15007, Nairobi.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sir,

I read in the last issue of the *Bulletin* that Life membership of the Society is to be abolished. The cost of paper and postage goes on increasing; we live too long and die without letting the Society know. All this is true, but the people most likely to be hurt, it seems to me, are those leaving the country and wishing to keep in touch. Not only those moving to Europe and America but also those going to countries near here, to whom the *Bulletin* and *Journal* may be of lively interest and differences of currency make yearly subscription difficult. It might be suggested to such that they pay a few years' subscription in one lump sum. Ex-members in Europe and America could do the same, or some other scheme could be thought out.

What does surprise me is that while ordinary subscriptions cannot be raised by even a few shillings without consulting the Annual General Meeting, the Executive Committee can at a single meeting, with perhaps a bare quorum and no warning or notice, abolish a whole class of members hitherto considered to be welcome and honourable.

P.M. Allen, Box 14166, Nairobi.

This would appear to be an issue which should be a source of more comment. The *Bulletin* would welcome letters on the subject from members.

Editor.

Sir,

Amboseli National Park 12/13 June 1983

A very large flock of Egyptian Geese *Alopochen aegyptiacus* consisting of well in excess of 300 individuals, was seen resting at the edge of the main swamp on both days. All appeared to be young birds or non-breeding adults.

Peter Davey, Box 15007, Nairobi.

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SOCIETY CAMP AT BUSHWHACKERS 15 - 17 JULY, 1983

This camp was as enjoyable as ever. The land has been sold to a local man who is anxious to keep the Safari Camp going at its usual standard and has indeed introduced many improvements. Mrs Stanton retains her house and remains as an unofficial hostess. The swimming pool has been restored and goats and cattle banished from the river bed in front of the camp. The staff are new and do not understand the routine of getting the bandas ready for incoming guests as well as did old Mbula (we wish him all happiness in his retirement after 50 years of service) but they will soon learn and the camp offers as ready a welcome as ever.

Conditions were extremely dry and very few plants were in flower. But there was a beautiful specimen of *Albizia anthelmintica* in the middle of camp and *Maerua* sp. and a *Cadaba* sp. for those who looked for them. In one corner of the camp was a *Combretum paniculatum* in flower and full of birds, Apalis, Whiteyes, Sunbirds and Tinkerbirds.

Of the birds themselves many interesting observations were made. White-browed Sparrow Weavers *Plocepasser mahali* were fussing about their nests as usual, but showed no signs of breeding. White-headed Buffalo Weavers *Dinemellia dinemelli* did not seem to be there at all. One wonders how many nests they will be able to rescue from the Starlings when they do return. Most of our old friends were about and one or two of special interest should be noted. Perhaps the one that caused most discussion was the Slate-coloured Boubou *Laniarius funebris*, a bird with which we are all familiar in the bush round the camp, but here it was, right in the camp itself, hopping about like a thrush and even entering bandas. Probably few of us had seen it so close before and some could not accept the identification. Much trouble was caused by the bright red eye in the picture in Williams' book (*The Birds of East and Central Africa*), as he is usually particular about eye colour. Jackson however, says "Iris dark brown" which is undoubtedly the truth. On return home to my Praed & Grant I find that they say it is "a bird of very similar habits to the Black-headed Gonolek *Laniarius barbarus* " and anyone who has lived in Kampala knows what they are. Again it is worth referring to Jackson (*Birds of Kenya Colony and the Uganda Protectorate*. Vol.3 p.1206) "at Entebbe it has been forced to adapt itself to circumstances. Before the advent of sleeping sickness and the adoption of rigid regulations for its suppression, it was almost entirely confined to the thick cover within a few hundred yards of the Lake. Since all bush and undergrowth has been cut down in order to rid such places of the dreaded Tsetse fly, it is now found in most gardens ... This enforced change from its native bush has had a very marked effect on its character. Formerly it was very shy and was rarely seen though constantly heard ... Now it is bolder and hops about on the ground and among the tree-tops in full view of passers-by". The same process is taking place at Bushwhackers. New trees are being planted and generously watered. There is even a sprinkler on the grass. The camp must seem an oasis in the dry bush. When next any of us go down in the dry season it would be worth asking our new landlord (I hope we may say our friend) for permission to visit the irrigated parts of his own farm, to see what is happening to birds there. *Thunbergia guerkeana* was in flower in the hedges there.

Another interesting observation was of Böhm's Spinetail *Neafrapus boehmi* going to roost in a line of Newtoni, I am afraid much mutilated, up stream from the camp. Much the most conspicuous bird must have been the Pearl-spotted Owlet *Glaucidium perlatum* which was calling loudly both after sunrise and before dark, and was seen several times by the more sharp-eyed. Two visiting naturalists, who happened to be there when we were, reported having seen an Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* and another bird which from their description must have been a Fishing Owl *Scotopelia peli*.

On Saturday evening Mr Bahardia gave us a show of slides, keeping our attention stretched by telling us he would use our opinion to help judge the slides in a competition of the Photographic Society to which he also belongs.

We owe most grateful thanks to Mr Mbindu and Mrs Jane Stanton for the success of this camp and also to our tireless leader and organizer, Mrs Lise Campbell for making it all possible. I think myself that we should get more profit out of such a camp if we followed the old custom of holding a meeting before members disperse to put out botanical specimens and discuss identifications and records of both birds and plants. The second half of the morning on Sunday seems to me a time that might have been suitable. People would have returned from their morning walk and those who had to leave that afternoon still had time to pack up. But of course the success of such a meeting depends on participants thinking it worth while to attend. After all, we are supposed to be studying Natural History and not just going on a picnic.

P.M. Allen, Box 14166, Nairobi.

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Please contact P. Davey, Box 42562. Phone 891290

The Society are anxious to dispose of a number of large index card boxes, suitable for 6" x 4" cards. These may be seen at the Society Office, offers to The Secretary, EANHS.

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Contact Brass, Box 59196, Nairobi. tel. 22121 (office hours).

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SOCIETY FUNCTIONS

MONDAY 12th September, 1983: In the Museum Hall, Nairobi at 5.30 p.m. Our Chairman, Professor John Kokwaro will give an illustrated lecture on "ORNAMENTAL PLANTS OF KENYA".

SUNDAY 18th September, 1983: Day excursion to the Embakasi area. Leader Mrs Judith Rudnai. Please meet at OLD Mombasa road 20 km from the last Nairobi round-about. (There is a turn-off from the new Mombasa road just before the Weighbridge station and just after the entrance to the Extelcoms station with some tall radio masts) Time 9 a.m. Please be prepared for some walking and bring a picnic lunch if you want to stay on after lunch.

MONDAY 10th October, 1983: in the Museum Hall, Nairobi at 5.30 p.m. Dr Harvey Croze of UNEP will give a lecture on environmental subjects.

20th - 23 October, 1983: Meru Mt. Kenya self-service lodge. Adults Sh.130/- per night, children UNDER 16 Sh.40/- per night. These rates are fully inclusive of all taxes and all equipment, bedding, etc. All you have to bring is food and drink. This is a beautiful area, and very suitable for a Society venue. Please make your own reservations with Mr Alan Dixson of Let's Go Travel, Caxton House, Standard Street, Nairobi, (the Main Post Office end of Standard Street), (Mr and Mrs Campbell will be away from Kenya during September and most of October) Meru Mt. Kenya Lodge has been reserved primarily for the Society. Please send in your cheque IN FULL when booking and quote your Society membership number. Also at the same time check up on whether the the last bit of the road to the lodge has been improved to ordinary car standard. The total distance from Nairobi is 225 km mainly on tarmac. The route is via Embu and Runyenjes.

MONDAY 14th November, 1983: in the Museum Hall, Nairobi at 5.30 p.m. Dr Esmond Bradley Martin will give an illustrated lecture on "THE DECLINE OF THE AFRICAN AND ASIAN RHINOCEROS".

SUNDAY 27th November, 1983: All day excursion to "POTHA" near Machakos by kind invitation and arrangement of Mrs Dorothy Percival. Please meet at the Museum at 9 a.m., be prepared for walking and bring a picnic lunch.

10th - 12th December, 1983: Week-end visit to Sotik, by kind invitation of Mr and Mrs C. Ziegler. More details in the next issue.

WEDNESDAY MORNING BIRD WALKS: Led by Mrs Fleur N'gweno continue. Please meet at the National Museum at 8.45 a.m. sharp

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NOTICE TO ANYONE INTERESTED IN BIRDS:

are you a birdwatcher/photographer/ringer newly arrived in Kenya, and in search of details of local birds, good areas to visit, relevant literature and ringing and other research schemes, Contact Adrian D. Lewis (Geology), Bcx 30197, Nairobi, for information.

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A FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF EAST AFRICA

QUICK INDEX

Mr Grumbley has compiled this quick index for the new edition of Williams' Field Guide which he and other members have found most useful. The format is of a size that can be cut out and pasted into the book.

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